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ABSTRACT

Recently, communication researchers have suggested that dialectics may offer a different way of looking at mediation, organizational conflict, and the fundamental oppositions of interpersonal bonding. Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery, through their relational dialectics perspective, have claimed a dialogical conceptualization of interpersonal/relational communication based upon very different assumptions than those of other interpersonal communication dialogic theorists. The paper explores the set of presuppositions inherent in relational dialectics that act as eyeglasses colored by the biases of a dialectical world view which Baxter and Montgomery fail to remove from their noses when using their "Bakhtinian eye." First the paper gives an overview of conflict theorists' shared interests in the dialectical perspective and the significance of relational dialectics. Then it summarizes Baxter and Montgomery's recent relational dialectics position and their two stances on interpersonal conflict. The paper then presents an interpretation of the implications for their dialectical position on conflict with a Bakhtinian critique. Although the converging of the dialectical and dialogical approaches to interpersonal communication has not been fully realized in relational dialectics, the paper concludes that Baxter and Montgomery have lit the way for a richer communication perspective of conflict which requires the "creative understanding" of both--they have given conflict researchers and theorists a look at the potential of dialogism for interpersonal communication and conflict. (Contains a table, 10 notes, and 157 references). (NKA)

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RETHINKING CONFLICT THROUGH THE DIALECTICAL GLASSES OF RELATIONAL DIALECTICS

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Abstract

The dialogical and dialectical approaches to interpersonal communication have intersected during my investigation of a dialectical view of conflict. Recently, Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery through their relational dialectics perspective have claimed a dialogical conceptualization of interpersonal/relational communication based upon very different assumptions than the other interpersonal communication dialogic theorists.

This paper explores the set of presuppositions inherent in relational dialectics that act as a pair of glasses colored by the biases of a dialectical worldview which Baxter and Montgomery fail to take off their noses when using their "Bakhtinian eye". One possible reason it never occurs to them to take these glasses off, stems from their homogenization of Bakhtin's work with the Marxist works of Voloshinov and Medvedev. Although others have made similar accommodations, Baxter and Montgomery transcribe Bakhtin's dialogism into a form of dialectics. Disregarding extensive evidence to the contrary and ignoring communication's dialogic tradition, Baxter and Montgomery have made the "messiness in Hegel and Marx" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a, p. 233) even messier. Yet in the process, they have recognized the potential of dialogism for interpersonal communication and conflict study even though they do not provide a coherent and consistent communication perspective for studying conflict based upon Bakhtin's dialogism.

After overviewing conflict theorists' shared interests in the dialectical perspective and the significance of relational dialectics, this paper summarizes Baxter and Montgomery's recent relational dialectics position and their two stances on interpersonal conflict. Then, the author presents an interpretation of the implications for their dialectical position on conflict with a Bakhtinian critique.

Although the converging of the dialectical and dialogical approaches to interpersonal communication has not been fully realized in relational dialectics, Baxter and Montgomery

have lit the way for achieving a richer communication perspective of conflict which requires the "creative understanding" of both.

Rethinking Conflict

Through the Dialectical Glasses of Relational Dialectics

> As dialectic, philosophy never ceases to be tied to its origin in Socratic discussion. What is mere talk, nothing but talk, can, however untrustworthy it may be, still bring about understanding among human beings---which is to say that it can still make human beings human. (Gadamer, 1980, p. 123).

Statement of the Problem

This legacy and my assumption about talk, including "conflict talk" (Grimshaw, 1990), has taken me to the crossroads of two formerly diverging, but now possibly converging, paths in interpersonal communication research. The dialogical[1] and dialectical[2] approaches, as foreshadowed by Plato, have intersected during my investigation of a dialectical view of conflict. Recently, Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery through their relational dialectics (1996a, 1995b) have claimed a dialogical conceptualization of interpersonal/relational communication based upon very different assumptions than the other interpersonal communication dialogic theorists. A quick look at their heritages points to their differences and now what they share.

The dialogic approach came up through the traditions of Plato, Dilthey, Heidegger, Gadamer, Buber, Mead, Sampson, and Bakhtin (Stewart, 1994; Stewart, 1996b, 1996c). After rejecting Plato's epistemological approach to dialectics, Baxter and Montgomery trace the lineage of relational dialectics through the "more ontologically oriented views" of Heraclitus, Lao Tzu, Hegel, Marx, Mao, Riegel, and Bakhtin (1996a, p. 19). By co-opting Mikhail Bakhtin, "a theorist central to dialogism" (Sampson, 1993, p. 15), Baxter and Montgomery claim relational dialectics allows for "both/and" dialectical/dialogical views of conflict (1996a).

I believe that the set of presuppositions inherent in relational dialectics act as a pair of glasses colored (Code, 1995, p. 5) by the biases of a dialectical worldview which Baxter and Montgomery fail to take off their noses when using their "Bakhtinian eye" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a, p. 233). One possible reason it never occurs to them to take off these glasses

(Wittgenstein, 1951), stems from their homogenization of Bakhtin's work with the Marxist works of Voloshinov (1927, 1930) and Medvedev (1928). They "flag" the question of authorship by adding "/Bakhtin" after citations by these other authors (p. 25). [3] Although others have made similar accommodations (i.e., Clark & Holquist, 1984; Fiske, 1987; Holquist, 1990; Morson, 1986a; Sampson, 1993; Todorov, 1984), Baxter and Montgomery transcribe his dialogism as a form of dialectics. Disregarding extensive evidence to the contrary (Morson & Emerson, 1989, 1990) and ignoring communication's dialogic tradition[4] (i.e., Stewart, 1994, 1996c), Baxter and Montgomery have made the "messiness in Hegel and Marx" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a, p. 233) even messier. In the process, they have recognized the potential of dialogism for interpersonal communication and conflict even though they do not provide conflict theorists with a coherent and consistent communication perspective for studying conflict based upon Bakhtin's dialogism.

In spite of this, they do have a "limited" claim to a dialogic view of conflict. "Through the lens of relational dialectics" (p. 143), they rely upon Voloshinov's description of language as "dialogically" incorporated into a Marxist dialectical system (Morson & Emerson, 1989). In addition, they use the metaphor of dialogue in the book's title and as foundational to concepts such as social life and communication. From the perspective of relational dialectics, "social life is constituted in the communicative practices of social actors in which multiple opposing tendencies are given voice. Social life is an unfinished, ongoing dialogue in which a polyphony of dialectical voices can be heard" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996b, p. 143). In this way, they use dialogic in the same manner as Voloshinov did. Because of this, I believe that they have a "limited" claim for using the term "dialogic," not based upon Bakhtin's dialogism, but upon Voloshinov's dialogics. As part of the dialectical tradition of understanding the world from the perspective of "surroundings" (Bakhtin, 1993), Baxter and Montgomery have recognized the need for the specific "field of vision" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 63) of dialogism that dialectical scholars need to work through along side the dialogical scholars in the spirit of "dialogic inquiry" (Baxter &

Montgomery, 1996a).

Just as Bakhtin's dialogism certainly influenced Voloshinov's and Medvedev's Marxist positions (Morson & Emerson, 1989), it has influenced Baxter and Montgomery's vision of relational communication. Although Baxter and Montgomery link Bakhtin's dialogism so closely with their relational dialectics that they "use the terms virtually interchangeable" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a, p. 47), their dialectical voice remains the most coherent and consistent. This voice calls strongest to other dialectical theorists, such as Irwin Altman. He stresses this voice in his comments on the book's back cover. "It [the book] draws on an enormous body of literature from many different fields, weaves them together in a coherent whole, and addresses all of the key issues associated with a dialectical orientation" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a). From this orientation, Baxter and Montgomery have developed a dialectic view of conflict with a dialogic view restricted to interactional competence, which deserves consideration as a communication perspective on conflict.

After overviewing conflict theorists' shared interests in the dialectical perspective and relational dialectics' significance, I will summarize Baxter and Montgomery's recent relational dialectics position and their two stances on interpersonal conflict. Then, I will present my interpretation of the implications for their dialectical position on conflict with a Bakhtinian critique. Although the converging of the dialectical and dialogical approaches to interpersonal communication has not been fully realized in relational dialectics, achieving the fullest communication perspective of conflict requires the "creative understanding" of both.

The Overview

Recently, conflict and interpersonal communication researchers have suggested that dialectics may offer a different way of looking at mediation (Jones, 1994), organizational conflict (Kolb & Putnam, 1992), and the fundamental oppositions of interpersonal bonding (Bochner, 1984). Jones (1994) presents an overview of the dialectical perspective used in interpersonal

studies to argue for its utility in understanding mediation. Accordingly, a dialectical perspective could provide: a relationally sensitive theory, which stresses the dimensionality of the "both/and", equally emphasizing process, contradictions, and change, all wrapped up in a communication perspective of conflict. Folger and Jones (1994) also emphasize the importance of a communication perspective of conflict. They explain that according to Putnam & Roloff, the lens of a communicative perspective examines the microprocesses of conflict stressing its dynamic features and "understanding the individual and social meanings" (1992, p. 13).

Before examining the particular form of dialectics taken by relational scholars, a broader view of its derivative from psychological studies will help in situating their work within the larger frame of dialectics. Kvale outlines the main aspects of dialectics[5] that guides dialectics within the human sciences. Dialectics generally:

-studies human behavior as internally related to its socio-historical *context.*;

-studies qualitative *changes* from the development of internal contradictions;

-allows interdependent and *conflicting* conceptions of a phenomenon;

-studies *internal* relations of a phenomenon, mutually implying and excluding each other;

-studies focuses upon the *qualitative* transformations, radical breaks, and quantitative increases contributing to the development of a phenomena;

-stresses the *interdependence* between observing-subject to observed-phenomenon and observation to active interpretation;

-looks for the *essence* of a phenomenon, which only discloses itself in extensive and concrete study of a phenomenon;

-involves the *concrete* analysis of concrete conditions by investigating its multiple aspects; and,

-denies the possibility of value-neutral descriptions and theories, but rather accomplishing changes through *praxis*, the criterion of knowledge (1976, pp. 89-90, paraphrased

with original italics).

Besides sharing research guides, interpersonal communication scholars also follow the lead of dialectical psychology in the areas of cognitive (Basseches; Kramer; Lawler; Riegel; Rychlak; Wozniak), moral (Hogan), and social (Murphy)[6] development. Following this tradition in the human sciences, interpersonal communication researchers using a dialectical perspective must determine: "the essential oppositions that propel the dynamics of that field . . . by positive study. Subcategories, specific to each field, as well as special methods of investigation appropriate to the particular subject matter, have to be developed" (Lawler, 1975, p. 16).

The field of interpersonal communication includes both relational and conflict researchers with similar foci, concepts, and phenomenal orientations. Whether conflict theorists focus on conflict as socially constrained, determined talk or social behavior manifested through talk (Gimshaw, 1990c), they study conflict as a social phenomenon. Within the conflict literature, the phenomenon of conflict has a dynamic, interdependent, tensional, and relational nature.

Conflict as a social phenomenon developed as part of the natural fabric of human history. From the beginning of the twentieth century, Simmel established the organizational and even facilitating nature of conflict for structuring interpersonal relationships (1908/1955). Besides destructiveness, Grimshaw (1990c) notes that the historic development of social conflict theory has acknowledged conflict's part in the generation of social structure and social processes (Coser, 1956; Dahrendorf, 1959; Collins, 1975). "Critical" textual analyses, including Marxian analyses, in the work of Althusser, Barthes, Derrida, Foucault, Habermas, and Marcuse, have included attempts to explain all or part of this generation (Grimshaw, 1990c). The arguments of the advantages and disadvantages, have given way to the acceptance of both along with the search for better understanding of conflict's destructive and productive directions.

Such an understanding requires a conception of conflict that calls for a careful analysis of both the specific behaviors and interaction patterns involved in conflict, and the forces that

influence these patterns (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 1993, p. 4).

The study of these behaviors, patterns, and forces requires a dynamic approach which captures the complexity of conflict without being unnecessarily complicated (Blalock, 1989). For example, Keltner's Struggle Spectrum presents a helical system with upward, downward, and backward flows where certain conditions may interrupt and change the dynamics (1994). The processes and developmental nature of conflict requires participant management, because of their interconnection.

Most definitions for conflict include interdependency and dualistic concepts. For example, Folger, Poole, and Stutman define conflict as: "the interaction of interdependent people who perceive incompatible goals and interference from each other in achieving those goals" (1993, p. 4). The study of this interaction has involved pairing contrastive concepts, such as; conflict-consensus (Simmel, 1908/1955), competition-cooperation (Deutsch, 1949), trust-suspicion (Deutsch, 1958), positive-negative sanctions (Dahrendorf, 1959), defensive-supportive communication (Gibb, 1961), productive-destructive conflict (Deutsch, 1969), threats-promises (Tedeschi, 1970). Such pairings, along with the intricacies of the incompatibility of goals and methods of achieving them, have prompted Kolb and Putnam to suggest the concept of "the dialectics of conflict" of which their "dialectics of disputing" would constitute a part (1992, p. 7).

In addition, "relationship is the keystone of conflict" (Jones, 1994, p. 28) in one way or another. For conflict talk analysts, the co-determined nature of talk makes the relationship a dimension of variability (Grimshaw, 1990c). For those examining conflict behavior, the relationship of the parties gets described in terms of a type of interactional goal which is relational (Wilson & Putnam, 1990; Hocker & Wilmot, 1991).

Besides sharing these similarities with relational scholars, dialectics may help conflict theorists to achieve the following: link the micro and the macro levels of conflict (Blalock, 1990; Putnam & Roloff, 1992; Grimshaw, 1990c); coordinate the research efforts across disciplines by resolving the problems of generalizability and usefulness (Cahn, 1990); and, fulfill the most

important objective of a full accounting of conflict processes[7] (Donohue, 1990). Dialectics appears to provide dynamic concepts that fit the investigation of the conflict process(es). Since dialectics purports to have a unitary developmental process (Tolman, 1983), promote scientific growth (Lawler, 1975), and the power to discover new truths or better understanding of old truths that no other method offers (Hook, 1953, p. 702), conflict researchers cannot ignore its potential especially since relational theorists have worked in applying this framework to interpersonal communication.

After describing what conceptualizations conflict and relationships share and what a dialectical approach to conflict could offer, it is time to generally describe what relational researchers have done using this framework. Since the 1980's a contingent of researchers have used a dialectical perspective (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a & 1996b) to study communication within the context of specific relationships, such as: divorcing couples (Masheter & Harris, 1986), family systems (Bochner, Bopp & Weeks, 1984; Weeks, 1977, 1986; Weeks & Wright, 1979), friendships (Rawlins, 1983a, b, 1989, 1992; Rawlins & Holl, 1987), and romantic couples (Goldsmith, 1990); as well as, relational development (Altman, et al., 1981: Baxter, 1988, 1989, 1990; Brown, Altman, & Werner, 1992; Taylor & Altman, 1987), maintenance (Montgomery, 1992, 1993), and temporality (Werner & Baxter, 1994). Implicitly or explicitly, they all use the dialectical framework to investigate and describe the dynamics of mutually, exclusive contradictory relational tensions and their generative interplay within and outside of a relationship. Even though, they differ in so many ways that it makes generalization about a particular concept difficult (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a), they get categorized together as a mode of explanation (Poole & McPhee, 1994), critical (Rawlins, 1992) or ideological stance (Lannamann, 1991), or dialectical voices (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a).

Unfortunately, relational studies using dialectics contain fragmentary references to conflict without any exclusively dedicated work (with the exception of a conflict taxonomy by Baxter, Wilmot, Simmons, & Swartz, 1993, which makes no claim to dialectics). After declaring that

"dialectics is not the equivalent of interpersonal conflict" (1994, p. 353), Werner and Baxter go on to explain it in terms of nonantagonistic and antagontistic contradictions. Since nonantagonistic contradictions occurs within the individual, interpersonal conflict may manifest antagonistic contradictions the parties face within the relationship. "If two parties align their respective interests and goals with different poles of a given contradiction, they are "mismatched" in their respective cyclic/spiraling rhythms and the dialectical struggle is antagonistic, that is, likely to involve interpersonal conflict" (p. 353). While the majority of work has dealt with nonantagonistic contradictions, Werner and Baxter cite four studies that have dealt with antagonistic contradictions that could involve conflict (1994). Table 1 indicates the name of the researcher(s) and date of publication, the relationship, and the antagonistic contradiction examined.

TABLE 1 - ANTAGONISTIC CONTRADICTIONS STUDIED

STUDY	RELATIONSHIP	CONTRADICTION
Masheter & Harris (86)*	Divorcing couples	Connection-Autonomy
Riessman (90)	Divorced couples	Inclusion-Seclusion
Masheter (94)	Divorced couples	Opening up-Closing up Stability - Change
Rawlins & Holl (87)	Adolescent friends	Telling-Withholding from others

For conflict theorists these few studies do not provide a sufficient basis for a dialectical conceptualization of conflict. The limited range of these studies, their non-explicit focus upon conflict, and their divergent dialectical conceptualizations, calls for examining more explicit conceptual development. The relational dialectics perspective of Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery provides just such an opportunity (1996a). Besides the extent and breadth of their research programs and their development of a theoretical framework, Baxter gets hailed as "one of the premier theorists in this area" (Jones, 1994, p. 43). In addition to their extant work and their prominence in the field of dialectics (Griffin, 1994; Lannamann, 1991; Poole & McPhee, 1994),

Baxter and Montgomery offer conflict theorists a communication perspective for conflict within a dialectical framework.

Relational Dialectics and Conflict

Baxter and Montgomery adopted a dialectical metatheoretical perspective (described as such by Altman, Vinsel, & Brown, 1981; Buss, 1979; Murphy, 1971; Rawlins, 1989; Rychlak, 1976) because of their dissatisfaction with current interpersonal relationship research. Their dissatisfaction concerned the limitations of the prevailing stage models which included: a static and linear nature (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996b); theoretical one-sidedness; and, neglect of the "both/and"-ness of relating (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a).

Baxter and Montgomery's relational dialectics theory (Knapp, Miller, Fudge, 1994), approach (Baxter, 1993; Werner & Baxter, 1994), perspective (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996b), or lens (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a) has prompted them to rethink "the theoretical approaches and research findings about communication in personal relationships" (p. 46) in their newly released book, Relating: Dialogues and Dialectics (1996a). "[T]he book is about the multivocal contradictions that are enacted in indeterminate ways in the localized dialogues between self and other" (p. 234).

They accomplish this in three parts. First, they establish relational dialectics' distinctiveness by employing the "both/and" method of analysis for shared assumptions with dialectical theory, or dialectical voices such as Bakhtin's dialogism, and selected communication research about relationships. Using a monologic, dualistic and relational dialectic-dialogic lens, the second section rethinks; relationship development, closeness, certainty, and the open self. The final section talks about the dynamics of selves, relationships, and culture, as well as, interactional analysis, and dialogic inquiry using their particular version of a dialogic view of dialectical theory.

The last chapter gives itself over to the dialogic with five fragments of conversation between Leslie and Barbara.[8] The five segments address the topics of: relational dialectics' dialogic

"turn"; their conceptualization of relationship; relational dialectics as a theory; dialogic scholarship; and, the book's unfinalizability. Through this dialogue, I hear their clearest statements about their conceptualization of Bakhtin's dialogism via their relational dialectics, communication, relationships, and interpersonal conflict. All of these concepts interface with conflict.

Through these fragments, the "messiness" of the dialectics and dialogism of relational dialectics, reveals the embedded nature of conflict. While maintaining their dialectical ontology and epistemology, they incorporated Bakhtin's dialogism because of their frustration with dialectics and Bakhtin's making communication "the centerpiece of dialectics" (p. 233).[9]

> In relational dialectics, communication manifests a relationship. Communication:
>
> "Is an interactive, involving, and situated process that produces multiple meanings that simultaneously differentiate and connect participants. Communication is the vehicle of social definition; participants develop a sense of self, partners develop a sense of their relationship, and societies develop a sense of identity through the process of communication. . . Language. . . is an important informational element in our relational dialectic perspective, but so too are such factors as intonation, style, pacings and rhythms, gestures, gazes, and the myriad of other actions that figure in interpretations of meanings. . . . Communication comes into existence in the interplay, often contentious, of these actions (p. 42). We agree with Voloshinov's/Bakhtin's [sic] (1973) view that intonation, style and the like "pump energy from a life situation into verbal discourse" (p. 103).

In this conceptualization, relational partners are "both/and" proactive subjects and reactive objects that make communicative choices. These choices constitute their concrete practices or praxis which simultaneously produces their future communicative choices from their past ones. Their relational practices give communicative life to the contradictions that organizes their relationship. So, praxis patterns result from the communicative choices made by each party as they jointly manage the dialectical tensions created by their relating, or becoming a relational pair (a relationship). Even though each party jointly owns the dialectical tensions as a member of the

relationship, the contradictions exists between the relationship and the partners (intrinsically) and the society (extrinsically). They do not belong to or exist between the relational parties. When these choices produce conflict they display the mismatching or low coordination of one or both partners' perception(s), interest(s), or pole alignment(s).

The work of Baxter and Montgomery concerning conflict has had the same two distinct phases as the development of their relational dialectics: their independent dialectical phase or "pre-Bakhtin" work (1996a, p. 230), and their collaborative dialogical or "Bakhtinian eye" (1996a, p. 233) phase. During the last fragment, Leslie first mentions conflict as an "out" chapter that they could have made an "in" chapter entitled, "Rethinking Conflict." She goes on to mention how they "touch on conflict as asynchrony in almost every chapter" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a, p. 238). After Barbara suggests some other could-have-been chapters, Leslie expresses her hope that through the book's "similar logic or heuristic from one chapter to the next", the reader could now "rethink a concept dialogically" of which conflict "offers a good example" (p. 238). Then, Barbara describes a dialogic view of conflict:

> If we view conflict dialogically, it ceases to be something that is problematic and that needs to be managed. Instead, it becomes an exemplar of dialogue, so long as the parties are not trying to silence one another. Critical to "good conversation" is respect for the voice of the other without forcing the other to share one's viewpoint. I believe it's very much an accident of our cultural upbringing that we have this need for consistency. It's too bad, because conflict is a good example of where couples and researchers alike have been socialized to think and act in distinctly nondialogical ways. It's hard to unlearn the old ways. Even as we have been doing in this book, we have felt this necessity to "be consistent" to silence disagreement between us in order to produce a "coherent" book. (p. 238)

Finally, Leslie integrates the topic of conflict in talking about the tensions involved with presenting "a smoothly rendered, consistent, monologic voice of relational dialectics" and their

having to hammer "out a variety of discrepancies about one idea after another" (p. 238). This suggests to her that in the spirit of relational dialectics, instead of a book perhaps "a publication of all of our conversations and E-mail messages in which we enacted the unity-and-difference of our dialogue" (p. 238). Basically, Leslie describes their past and present work about interpersonal conflict as dialectical. Barbara talks about the possibility of a dialogic view of conflict. In the process both of them mention the conflicting unity-difference tension they experienced as co-authors.

As a third sister joining the dialogue, I will now share that "Bakhtinian eye" to view the weaknesses of a relational dialectics' view of conflict dialectically, and its "limited" dialogic view. Bakhtin's continual critique of "theoreticism" (Bakhtin, 1993), which included Marxism (Todorov, 1985; Morson, 1985; Morson & Emerson, 1989, 1990), and his non-Marxist, non-semiotic, non-Freudian, non-Formalist ideas (Morson & Emerson, 1989) still applies to relational dialectics. Baxter and Montgomery acknowledge some of Bakhtin's criticism of dialectics. They attempt to explain how their view does not contain the same inadequacies. I will describe relational dialectics' conceptualizations of conflict, provide a hypothetical example of a research study, and give it a quick Bakhtinian critique to highlight relational dialectics' limitations as a communication perspective to conflict.

Relational Dialectics' Dialectical View of Conflict

Before explaining what constitutes interpersonal conflict in relational dialectics, Baxter and Montgomery distinguish it from contradictions. They decry the unfortunate negative denotation and connotation of "contradiction," which is a core dialectical concept. They contend that dialectics liberates contradiction from such negativity by making it the driver of change in social life.

Baxter and Montgomery contend that relational contradictions do not constitute interpersonal conflict. For them "[c]ontradictions are a ubiquitous aspect of social relationships and that communication plays a most significant role in the ongoing experience of contradiction"

(Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a, p. 43). As social entities, relationships organize around contradictions. Citing Voloshinov/Bakhtin [sic] (1973), they explain: "[I]f the word is the bridge between partners, then the partners' relationship is at the gap. . . Relationships exist in this "world in between consciousness" (Clark & Holquist, 1984, p. 9)" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a, p. 43). Like all social systems, close personal relationships' composition include "both fusion with and differentiation from, both centripetal and centrifugal forces, and both interdependence and independence" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a, p. 43). When communication displays contradiction, it does not necessarily indicate the failure, inadequacy, or incompetence of one or both of the relational partners as social actors or of their social system.

In relational dialectics, contradiction refers to "the dynamic interplay between unified oppositions" (p. 8). This means that these oppositions must be "actively incompatible and mutually negate one another" (p. 8) within a unity of identity and interactive unity. This does not make contradiction conflict-free. Contradiction does get experienced individually by each relational partner. As long as an individual does not express or manifest the contradiction through communication, or as nonantagonistic, it does not get designated as conflict. Once the contradiction gets social life given to it through communication, it may display relational conflict.

Although in some ways, dialectical contradiction superficially resembles role conflict, Baxter and Montgomery determine three fundamental distinctions between the two. First, unlike role conflict, in dialectics "an inherent feature of sociality is the interplay of contradictory opposites" (p. 8), or contradiction. Secondly, in dialectics, this neither positive nor negative interplay constitutes an absolute necessity for change within any living system, such as a relationship. Role theory makes such incompatibility a negative condition. Thirdly, the structural problem of role conflict involves stable role expectations, whereas the struggle of contradiction in dialectics is a dynamic and fluid process where each struggle "sets in motion the nature of the struggle at a subsequent point in time" (p. 8). This does not mean that role conflict cannot get manifested in relational communications. It means that role conflict theory inadequately explains

the phenomenon. Role conflict theory constitutes contradiction as negative, non-foundational, and individualistic within static structures. It fails to account for the neutral, fluid, and dynamic processes of relational contradictions and change.

After determining the generic nature of contractions as not conflict, Baxter and Montgomery indicate three manifestations of dialectical contradiction in and through interpersonal conflict. The three manifestations mentioned involve conflict: as a kind of routine; sometimes as asynchrony; and, always as violence. The first and last get mentioned with little development, while asynchrony gets addressed "in almost every chapter" (p. 238).

Conflict as a routine gets included with other relational routines as part of relationships within social networks. The conflicts of one couple influences others in the social network. "Both family and couple continuously adapt to each other's needs as they jointly enact courtships, weddings, honeymoons, celebrations, conflicts, and the other routines and memorable moments" (p. 169). In this case, conflict interconnects a couple with other relationships and their community. Baxter and Montgomery's "Western conceptualization of the social structure" (p. 181), reifies these social concepts (Lannamann, 1990) including conflict. By unitizing relationships, conflict gets unitized which mechanizes the social processes, relationships, and conflict itself. So the chain reaction of relational conflict becomes an expected, disruptive but necessary social routine. Although contradictions are not conflict, their expressed manifestation though relational communication can get displayed in conflict as "asynchrony" between the couple and society and between relational partners.

As stipulated by Leslie, conflict gets most often described dialectically as "asynchrony." This continues to develop conflict as antagonistic contradiction as described by Werner and Baxter (1990) in terms of interactional management. Conflict remains a manifestation of relational contradiction jointly enacted by partners.

Baxter and Montgomery have chosen, to distinguish conflict as jointly enacted antagonistic contradiction between partners. They describe how antagonistic contradiction relates to

asynchronization between the relational partners in their concluding remarks about praxis or praxical patterns. After describing the eight patterns, they explain how their presentation has assumed two relational partners with synchronous perceptions and evaluations with regard to a given contradiction. They continue:

> However, interpersonal conflict between the parties may overlay praxis patterns if an antagonistic contradiction is present. . . . [A]n antagonistic contradiction takes place when the parties align with different oppositional poles. In this instance, each party functions as an advocate of a dialogic force that is oppositional to the other's wishes. Interpersonal conflict is likely to take place, and the praxis pattern that emerges is likely to reflect the joint management of conflict. (p. 67)

To describe asynchrony, Baxter and Montgomery call upon Giddens and Mao. Giddens (1979) notes that conflict may surface dialectical interplay when parties become "out of sync" with each other in their momentary experience of contradiction. Mao (1965) refers to this type of asynchrony as "antagonistic struggle." In this case, interpersonal conflict may result from the relational partners' synchrony being too low. In short, interpersonal conflict may or may not result from partners' synchrony being "out of sync" or too low.

To place this in a context, I will attempt a hypothetical extension by using the example Leslie provides in the last dialogue fragment. Following Barbara's dialogic view of conflict comment, Leslie states:

> Yes, we've had this ongoing tension between the presentation, on the one hand, of a smoothly rendered, consistent, monologic voice of relational dialectics, and, on the other hand, the back-and-forth discussions between us as we have hammered out a variety of discrepancies about one idea after another. Maybe a book more true to the spirit of relational dialectics would be a publication of all of our conversations and E-mail messages in which we enacted the unity-and-difference of our dialogue (p. 238).

Within the relationship of co-authors, Barbara and Leslie have had to manage the ongoing tension

of producing a "smoothly rendered" book by hammering out their discrepant ideas, which displays a contradiction inherent to the relationship of co-authoring. The "hammering out" may display the contradiction through interpersonal conflict. If the hammering out occurs intrapersonally or remains unexpressed, then interpersonal conflict is unlikely. If the hammering out gets worked on by the two of them as displayed in their communicative choices which match, then interpersonal conflict is unlikely. If the hammering out gets worked on by the two of them as displayed in their communicative choices but they mismatch or their sync is too low, then interpersonal conflict is likely.

Hypothetically, I propose that Barbara and Leslie have made communicative choices that violate each other partner's perception, interest, or pole alignment. Since co-authoring a book takes many months, perhaps they had three such incidents. One time, Barbara and Leslie argued because Leslie felt that Barbara put too much emphasis on the work of her colleagues and did not mention those researchers important to Leslie. A second time, Leslie decided the book was getting too technical with all the dialectical terminology, and she insisted that they re-write the chapter they had finished yesterday. So between discussing, disagreeing, arguing, silencing, and stalling activities, they did not complete any more of the book. A third time, Barbara packed up and went home because she believed they would meet their deadline, if each of them worked on different chapters, while Leslie argued for working together because there would be no time for her input before the deadline.

For a researcher studying co-authoring relationships, these episodes would manifest the co-authoring tension of coherence-discrepancy or unity-difference. Working with Baxter, Wilmot, Simmons and Swartz's conflict taxonomy study (1993), Baxter and Montgomery's previous studies, and the framework of relational dialectics, a researcher might proceed as follows.

RQ 1: What conflicts do co-authors enact to deal with the coherence-discrepancy tension?[10]

RQ 2: What praxis patterns emerge from coherence-discrepancy conflict?

After establishing the questions and the research protocol, either Barbara or Leslie would

get selected for a study of co-authoring coherence-discrepancy. The researcher would call the chosen one, say Barbara, and ask her to think about coherence-discrepancy and "all the different ways you and your . . . partner enact conflict between you" (Baxter, Wilmot, Simmons, & Swartz, 1993, p. 94) before coming to the university for a scheduled interview. Five to seven days later, Barbara would go for an audio taped interview. The interviewer would first ask her to describe in detail the most recent coherence-discrepancy conflict she had had with her co-author. Then, the interviewer would probe "(a) how the conflict began, (b) how the conflict unfolded, (c) how the conflict ended, and (d) what she liked or disliked about the conflict enactment" (p. 94). After these details, the interviewer using Spradley's method (1979), would ask her to give a grand "tour" of all of the other ways she enacted conflict with Leslie that were different from the most recent one she just described. As she mentions each different method, the interviewer would ask her how it compared and contrasted with the forms already identified. After producing this verbalized list, Barbara would fill out Wheeless' 20-item Solidarity Scale (1976, 1978) or a similar scale suitable for co-author relationships.

After interviewing all of the co-authors in the sample (that excluded their partners), "the corpus of conflict enactment processes" (p. 95) would undergo three analytic procedures: analytic induction, componential analysis, and category scheme coding. After producing a final set of conflict-event categories, the researcher would then determine the emergent praxis patterns produced from the overlay of conflict on synchronous praxis patterns that this sample of co-authors use to cope with coherence-discrepancy.

Now these praxical patterns could get incorporated into dialectics communicative choice model to determine the interactional competence of co-author partners. As Barbara mentions in her dialogic view of conflict, she regards "|c|ritical to "good conversation". . . Respect for the voice of the other without forcing the other to share one's viewpoint" (P. 238). Although unlikely in co-authoring relationships, but likely in marital relationships, the "forced cooperation of violence" (p. 201) violates this criteria, which is the third way Baxter and Montgomery address conflict.

Although violence "cannot be competent" (p. 201), conflict becomes incompetent when it curtails dialogue by forcing compliance. Incompetent dialogue may occur when one or both parties use the conflict styles of avoidance, the distributive behaviors of combative assertion of a single position (Canary & Spitzberg, 1989), or the "chilling effect" (Roloff & Cloven, 1990) of power differences. Obviously, such incompetence would violate their dialogic principles of "ongoing exchange, joint action, and interactive creativity" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a, p. 202) necessary for "good conversation."

Whether a relational routine, an expressed antagonistic contradiction, or violence, relational dialectics dialectically and dialogically (as in dialogue) views conflict as asynchrony. A couple's conflict produces a mismatching or low synchrony within the social network. Relational partners display asynchrony through conflict. Finally, interpersonal violence manifests the incompetent management of tensions by one or both relational partners because silencing the other disrupts dialogue. At the relational level, relational dialectics has opened a door into a vastly unexplored domain from a communication perspective. In addition, they have fulfilled the requirements Lawler describes as required by this tradition in the human sciences (1975). They have "identified the essential oppositions that propel the dynamics of" relational conflict "by positive study" (p. 16), using a dialectical perspective.

Taking the hypothetical study of co-author conflict, which uses relational dialectics' root metaphor of asynchrony (which would also include conflict as a routine and as violence), the researcher would examine dynamic features of microprocesses and meanings at the structural level of the relationship. As a communication perspective on conflict, the relational tensions and their asynchronous management by the partners' communicative choices displayed through conflict would constitute the dynamic features. These choices would form praxical patterns. Some of these patterns would be determined by researchers to have more productive outcomes for the relationship. A healthy relationship would display praxical patterns that quantitatively and qualitatively manage synchrony. The microprocesses get examined only at the relational level. The

specifics of the "conflict talk" get homogenized into a monologic account of how some relational partners identify, describe, and order conflicts manifesting relationally-specific tensions.

Since "[a]ny orientation to conflict includes both a view of what conflict is, as a social phenomenon, and a corresponding view of what the ideal response to conflict should be" (Folger & Baruch Bush, 1994, p. 9), by making conflict asynchronous, the ideal response consists of achieving synchrony. Relational dialectics' celebration of multivocal differences, reduces conflict to balancing non-coordinated communicative choices. Basically, it all comes down to transcribing parties' conflicts as manifestations of relational contradictions that get explained as praxical patterns.

According to a Bakhtinian critique of relational dialectic, Baxter and Montgomery's dialectics: maintains a systems orientation; removes responsibility from the partners except as they are incompetent interactionally; transcribes the eventness of language and conflict into process; and maintains the monologic voice of the researcher looking for universal relational contradictions manifested in communication. For as Bakhtin's criticism of "theoreticism" (which he applied to dialectics, semiotics, psychology, and which I have drawn a dotted line, to include relational dialectics because it maintains ties to all three) indicates:

> It is illegitimate to substitute a system of logical relations between values for a value-governed architectonic,. . . There can be no such relations between an abstractly ideal concept and an actual, concrete object. It is equally illegitimate to abstract in a human being from his concrete actuality, leaving only a skeleton of meaning. (1993, p. 63)

Concluding Remarks

As a communication perspective, Bakhtin' (1993) and Sartre's (1963) criticism of dialectical materialism applies. Relational dialectics has inherited the Marxist understanding of relationships entirely from the perspective of "surroundings" without any sense of the "field of vision" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 63) of the partners. Each partner and relationship has a unique "field of

vision" or set of individual and social meanings. Relational dialectics allows no access to the microlevel of individual relationships or what occurs between partners. In addition, relational dialectics limits its view to the "surroundings" of relational conflict without any "field of vision" of the partners, except for that of the researcher's overview.

Unfortunately, relational dialectics can only conceptualize conflict as "something that is problematic and that needs to be managed" (p. 238). Whether as a relational routine, asynchrony, or incompetent interaction, Baxter and Montgomery do not provide any means for understanding the individual or social meanings of the relational partners because of its psychologized, mechanical, dialectical ontology and epistemology. The mechanism of the relationship produces the tension which maintains the reductionistic nature of Hegel's negative, and mutually exclusive contradictions (Gadamer, 1971). As they admit, they have replaced Marxism's means of economic production with communicative choices, but I believe they have only replaced economic production with interpersonal relational production.

Baxter and Montgomery recognized the inadequacies of Hegelian/Marxist dialectics throughout the book, but their maintenance of a dialectical orientation continues the reification of Marxist materialism and Hegelian monologization. In the process, they have given conflict researchers a look at the potential of dialogism for interpersonal communication and conflict. Although they have not provided conflict theorists with a coherent and consistent communication perspective for studying conflict dialogically, their vision has provided much guidance for pursuing a dialectical view even with all of its "messiness." With their dialectical glasses and their "Bakhtinian eye," they have provided interpersonal communication and conflict theorists a glimpse of Bakhtin's unique vision. Therefore, I believe that to achieve full vision with a "Bakhtinian eye", and possibly a relational dialogics, we must reconnect it to a dialogical way of making sense of the world. For as Bakhtin reminds scholars: "It is only from my own unique place in Being that I *can* be and *must* be active" (Bakhtin, 1993, p. 60, italics in translation).

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Footnotes

[1]I have included in this characterization of a dialogic approach communication scholars such as: Anderson, 1994; Arnett, 1981, 1989, 1992; Christians, 1988; Johannesen, 1971; Poulakos, 1974; and Stewart, 1978, 1986, 1992, 1995, 1996a. Although all of these scholars do not claim interpersonal communication as their primary field, they have maintained the importance of dialogue as their focus of study. John Stewart's extensive work in interpersonal communication, as evidence by his textbook (1993) and reader (1990), has brought him to a dialogical conceptualization of interpersonal communication. From his interpersonal philosophy of language (1995; 1996b), which draws upon Bakhtin (1981, 1986; Clark &Holquist, 1984: Holquist, 1981) and Volshinov (1973) sources, he argues for the incompatibility of his dialogic/interpersonal communication approach and the semiotic, representational, instrumental approach, a form of which Baxter and Montgomery use.

Kenneth Cissna's work has straddled both approaches with his commitment to dialogue (Anderson & Cissna, 1996; Anderson, Cissna, & Arnett, 1994; Cissna & Anderson, 1990) based upon his Batesonian-Rogerian sense of relational communication from his work on interpersonal confirmation (1975; Cissna & Sieburg 1981, 1990) and dialectical view of relationships (Cissna, Cox, & Bochner, 1990). The compatibility of the two in his current work require analysis beyond the scope of this paper. With that said, I do believe that it represents the ability to use dialectical methods within a dialogical worldview, especially given his "dialogic criticism" of the conversational text of the Buber-Rogers dialogue (Anderson & Cissna, 1996).

[2]The relational/interpersonal scholars I have associated with the dialectical approach include: I. Altman, L. A. Baxter, M. J. Bopp, B. B. Brown, V. E. Cronen, L. M. Harris, D. Goldsmith, C. Masheter, B. M. Montgomery, W. K. Rawlins, D. A. Taylor, G. R. Weeks, and C. M. Werner (1994). The works that I have drawn upon are listed in the references.

[3]Baxter and Montgomery cite Morson and Emerson's Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a prosaics (1990) without acknowledging Morson and Emerson's retraction of their earlier tacit acceptance of Clark & Holquist (1984) claims for Bakhtin authoring the "disputed texts". Throughout Morson and Emerson's description of Bakhtin's metalinquistics, they compare and contrast Bakhtin's conceptualizations with Volshinov's and Medvedev's and against Marxism, semiotics, psychology, and systems theory.

While Holquist has continued to insist upon Bakhtin's authorship (1990), Morson and Emerson in their "Introduction - Part Two: The Disputed Texts" for Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges (1989) present in the opening quote the most convincing argument against allowing another to author his work. According to Bakhtin, "What would I have to gain if another were to *fuse* with me?" (p. 31) Because of their fusion and their dialectical glasses, Baxter and Montgomery continue, as "is quite common among Bakhtin's admirers, especially Marxists, to misinterpret centrifugal forces as a unified opposition. Bakhtin's point, however, is that although forces of organized opposition sometimes *do* coalesce, centrifugal forces are generally speaking messy and disorganized" (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 30). Baxter and Montgomery's commitment to unified oppositions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996a, p. 9), prevent them from accurately presenting Bakhtin's conceptualization of unit-y and creative understanding.

[4]Baxter and Montgomery "ignore" communication's dialogic tradition in two ways. First, with a few exceptions, they exclude dialogic communication researchers in their references while citing again with perhaps no exception all of the dialectical scholars in all areas. Secondly, they

distance themselves from communication scholars by focusing on "dialectics-as-ontology" (p. 18), instead of dialectics-as-epistemology which is probably the "meaning of dialectics with which communication scholars are most familiar because of their intellectual roots in rhetoric" (p. 19).

[5]Kvale uses a unitary conception for the purpose of comparison and general summary, while acknowledging the divergencies between different dialectical traditions within the human science.

[6]The references section lists the cited works of each of these dialectical psychologists.

[7]William Donohue's critique of Wilson and Putnam's interactional goals framework for negotiation (1990) included "providing a full accounting of negotiation processes" (p. 418) as the most important objective that the framework fails to provide. I have made the extension that, at the broadest level, conflict theorists have providing a full accounting as their most important objective.

[8]Since relational dialectics voices Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery unique, subjective position(s) their names and relational dialectics will interchangeably stand for the other. I also recognize that their writings, along with the others mentioned, momentarily fix their position(s) for us to examine, interpret, and question together further.

[9]I believe that this statement more accurately applies to Voloshinov's dialogics as presented in his book, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language.

[10]This hypothetical study assumes that coherence-discrepancy as identified by both Barbara and Leslie, has already been determined to be a co-authoring tension. In addition, given Baxter and Montgomery's framework of having past communicative choices, which would include their research choices, constrain future choices, the study I propose builds upon their preceeding research methods. I will grant that examining only one dialectical tension is simplistic in light of their new-found dialogic conceptions. I believe that it is sufficient to give a sense of what conflict research could reasonably look like using relational dialectics with a continued commitment to interviewing and finding praxical patterns.